

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Women's empowerment and economic development are closely related: in one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women; in the other direction, empowering women may benefit development. The persistence of gender inequality is most starkly brought home in the phenomenon of "missing women". The term was coined by Amartya Sen in a classic article in the New York Review of Books (Sen, 1990) to capture the fact that the proportion of women is lower than what would be expected if girls and women throughout the developing world were born and died at the same rate, relative to boys and men, as they do in Sub Saharan Africa. Today, it is estimated that 6 million women are missing every year (World Development Report, 2012) of these, 23 percentage never born, 10 percent are missing in early childhood, 21 percent in the reproductive years, and 38 percent above the age of 60. Stark as the excess mortality is, it still does not capture the fact that throughout their lives, even before birth, women in developing countries are treated differently than their brothers, lagging behind men in many domains. For each missing woman, there are many more women who fail to get an education, a job, or a political responsibility that they would have obtained if they had been men.

Keywords: Women's empowerment, missing women, World Development Report, World Bank, Millennium Development Goals, business case

In contrast, many emphasize the second relationship, from empowerment to development. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, for example, has argued that achieving gender equality is a "prerequisite" to achieving the other Millennium Development Goals (MDG), including eliminating poverty, reducing infant mortality, achieving universal education, and eliminating the gender gap in education by 2015 (United Nations, 2005). In its report, "Engendering Development," the World Bank (2001) calls for policies to address gender imbalance in "rights, resources, and voice," and recommends that institutional structures be overhauled to promote equality, and that specific measures, such as girls' scholarships and quotas for women in parliament, be adopted. These measures are justified, according to the report, not only because they promote equity, but also because they are necessary to accelerate development.

Interestingly, the 2012 World Development Report (World Bank, 2011) adopts a much more nuanced message. While it emphasizes the "business case" for women empowerment, it mainly takes it as given that the equality between women and men is a desirable goal in itself, and policies should aim to achieve that goal.

Development policies and programs tend not to view women as integral to the economic development process. This is reflected in the higher investments in women's reproductive rather than their productive roles, mainly in population programs. Yet women throughout the developing world engage in economically productive work and earn incomes. They work primarily in agriculture and in the informal sector and, increasingly, in formal wage employment. Their earnings, however, are generally low. Since the 1950s, development agencies have responded to the need for poor women to earn incomes by making relatively small investments in income-generating projects. Often such projects fail because they are motivated by welfare and not development concerns, offering women temporary and part-time employment in traditionally feminine skills such as knitting and sewing that have limited markets. By contrast, over the past twenty years, some nongovernmental organizations, such as the Self-Employed Women's Association in India, have been effective in improving women's economic status because they have started with the premise that women are fundamental to the process of economic development.

This paper reviews the evidence on both sides of the empowerment-development relationship. It first shows that poverty and lack of opportunity breed inequality between men and women, so that when economic development reduces poverty, the condition of women improves on two counts: first, when poverty is reduced, the condition of everyone, including women, improves, and second, gender inequality declines as poverty declines, so the condition of women improves more than that of men with development. Economic development, however, is not enough to bring about complete equality between men and women. Policy action is still necessary to achieve equality between genders. Such policy action would be unambiguously justified if empowerment of women also stimulates further development, starting a virtuous cycle.

Women Empowerment and Poverty

The first way by which economic development reduces inequality is by relaxing the constraints poor households face, thus reducing the frequency at which they are placed in the position to make life or death choices. Because these tragic choices are often resolved at the expense of women's wellbeing, increasing the resources available to families, as economic development does, reduces the excess vulnerability of women. Even in the countries where the preference for boys is strongest, the evidence that girls systematically receive less care than boys under normal circumstances is not as clear-cut as one might guess. It is, of course, very difficult to observe whether, for example, girls are given less to eat than boys, since households under observation are likely to change their behavior. Also, when asked to keep diaries of how much each member consumes over a given period, households may misreport the portions given to boys and girls. Finally, households may give the same amount to boys and girls, but girls' needs may be different. Angus Deaton (1989,

1997) proposed an ingenious way to use household consumption data to indirectly estimate whether girls are given less to eat than boys. He noted that when a child is born, the household, in effect, becomes poorer, since there is now one more person to feed—one who will remain unproductive for a long while. This means that the adult members of the household need to cut down on their own consumption to make room for the new expenditures. Observing the extent to which the household consumption of “adult goods,” such as cigarettes, alcohol, or adult clothing drops when a child is born, provides us with an indirect estimate of the “cost” of the child. If families expand fewer resources on girls, for example, if girls are given less to eat than boys, then the adults will cut their consumption of adult goods by a smaller amount when they have an extra girl than when they have an extra boy. Yet, both in Cote d’Ivoire, where Deaton first conducted the research, and in Pakistan, where he repeated the analysis (Deaton 1997), there is no evidence that households reduce consumption of adult goods less for a girl than for a boy.

The lack of evident discrimination in everyday life is also apparent, for example, in immunization rates. The vaccination differential between boys and girls in India is small or non-existent (according to the National Family Health surveys, girls have received 4.55 shots, and boys 4.79 shots). Rajasthan is one of the states in India with the lowest female to male ratio and the lowest immunization rate among States in India. Yet, Banerjee et al. (2010) find no difference in immunization rates between boys and girls: on average, boys had received 1.19 immunizations, and girls 1.18. This is not to say that girls are not treated differently than boys. The differential treatment is observed when either children or parents face extreme circumstances. India has one of the largest discrepancies in gender-specific mortality rates. One reason for this is that girls are treated differently when ill: for example, a study found that in the poor neighborhoods of New Delhi, girls are more than twice as likely to die of diarrhea (Khanna et al., 2003). This may cause, not only excess mortality, but a progressive deterioration in the nutritional status of girls compared to boys, even if girls eat as much as boys. If poor households are less likely to spend money on a girl’s illness than on a boy’s illness, then improved access to health services, through either health insurance for the entire family or free medical care for the poor, would disproportionately help girls, even if parents do not change their behavior towards them. Differential treatment of girls and boys also becomes acute when the household itself is facing a crisis. In India, the excessive mortality rate of girls, relative to boys, spikes during droughts. When they cannot afford to feed everyone, families disproportionately sacrifice the welfare of girls (Rose, 1999). Research conducted in rural Tanzania shows explicitly how the vulnerability of women increases when households face a crisis. When the harvest is bad, due to droughts or floods, and food is scarce, the murder of “witches” (almost always old women) is twice as likely to occur as in normal years (Miguel, 2004). If crises throw poor households into circumstances in which they are more likely to discriminate against

vulnerable women, then increasing the ability of poor households to weather crises would disproportionately help women.

These two examples suggest that just reducing the grip of poverty on these households or helping them to deal with crises, could improve the welfare of women of all ages. Ali et al. (2011) show that in seven countries around the world (including Afghanistan and India), there is no difference in the ways that girls and boys are treated by health practitioners once they reach the facility. If facilities were closer and easier to reach, parents would likely be bringing boys and girls more often, and they would then be equally treated. Some also argue that, mechanically, improvements in water and sanitation conditions, as well as the better control of infection, may also be more beneficial to girls than to boys, because boys are more susceptible to congenital deformation, and their disadvantage compared to girls, is lower for infectious diseases (Drevenstedt et al., 2008).

As households become richer, they will also be less likely to face choices at the margin of subsistence. Indeed, in India, the study by Rose (1999) showed that households that can buffer their consumption in a bad year—those, for example, with assets to sell—do not show the dramatic increase in relative mortality of girls during droughts. This first suggests that providing households with insurance against risk may reduce both child mortality and the mortality gap between boys and girls, and second, that households that are a little richer are less likely to be thrown into desperation by bad rainfall. Reducing poverty, it seems, even without targeting women, will disproportionately help women. Pension remittances in South Africa offer suggestive evidence of how a non-targeted transfer can improve the plight of women. At the end of apartheid, in the early 1990s, old-age pension programs, previously limited to whites, were expanded to cover South Africans of all races. Since the introduction of the program, which killings in rural Northern Province have dropped dramatically (Singer, 2000). It is, of course, difficult to definitively establish causality given the many other political and social changes that occurred in South Africa during the same period. Economic development reduces poverty. It increases the ability—distinct from will—of households to withstand crises and the ability of governments to insure their poorest citizens against sickness and hunger. Thus, by reducing the vulnerability of poor households to risk, economic development, even without specifically targeting women, disproportionately improves their well-being.

Economic Development, Fertility and Maternal Mortality

Other than pre-birth and in early childhood, women are most likely to be missing relative to men in childbearing years. This, of course, is not the result of active discrimination, but due to the fact that women carry children and give birth, and that in itself is a dangerous activity. Other than directly affecting the welfare of women (and not men) in a significant way, maternal mortality is potentially a source of lower parental

investment in childhood: if parents expect girls to be much more likely to die as young women than boys, they may be more inclined to invest in boys. Jayachandran and Lleras-Muney (2009) find that the sudden reduction in maternal mortality in Sri Lanka (brought about by effective public policy) led to a convergence in the education level of boys and girls. They estimate that every year of increase in life expectancy leads to an increase in years of education of girls (relative to boys) of 0.11 of a year. This creates two ways for economic development to potentially improve the relative welfare of women: by reducing the chance that they die at each childbirth, and because economic development goes hand in hand with a reduction in fertility. Overall, fertility decreases with income and education and age at first birth increases. Age at first birth is a risk factor in maternal mortality: very young mothers are more likely to die or have complications in childbirth. Fertility has declined dramatically in most developing countries over the last two decades, with few countries now having a total fertility rate of 6 or higher. That in itself has had a mechanical impact in reducing the number of missing women by decreasing the number of chances a woman has to die during her childbearing years.

Expanding Opportunities for Women in Labor Market

The fact that women have fewer opportunities in the labor market may contribute to their unequal treatment in the household. Parents have lower aspirations for their daughters than for their sons, and teenagers themselves have lower aspirations. For example, in West Bengal, Beaman et al. (2011) find that in places where no woman had ever been the local leader, 86% of parents wanted their daughters to be either a housewife or whatever their in-laws would decide for her (the corresponding fraction was below 1 percent for the boys). If women do not work outside the home, there may be a perception that they do not need to be as strong and healthy and that they do not need a formal education. Interviews of parents in five states in north India conducted for the Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) in India (The PROBE Team, 1999), found that as high as 10 percent of them believed that it was *not* important for girls to be educated—only up to 1 percent believed the same for boys. Fifty-seven percent wanted their sons to study “as far as possible,” while only 28 percent wanted the same for their daughters. Many parents believed that educating girls is not necessary, since girls are only expected to marry and take care of their households. In the Beaman et al (2011) study, 32% of the parents reported that they wanted their teenage boys to graduate from secondary school or college, and only 18% wished the same for their girls. If part of the motivation for educating children is to enhance their employment opportunities, then improving the opportunities available to women in the labor market would provide a strong catalyst for the treatment of women to change for the better. Economic development leads to a change in the nature of work that is more conducive to women’s work.

Freeing up Women's Time

A key source of inequality between women and men stems from the way they are expected to spend their time. Berniell and Sanchez (2011) conducted a study of time use for the World Development Report 2012, using data for 23 countries from the Multinational Use Study, and 12 countries that they added to make the data set more representative of poor countries. A clear, unsurprising pattern emerges: at all level of incomes, women do the majority of housework and care and, correspondingly, spend less time in market work. The difference ranges from 30% more time spent on housework by women than men in Cambodia to 6 times more in Guinea, and from 70% more time for child care in Sweden to ten times more in Iraq. These differences have an impact on women's ability to participate in market work, be fully engaged in their career, etc. This is one reason why women in developing countries are more likely to be involved in informal work (such as running a small business) that may not be the most productive use of their time. For example, they may run a shop from their house in order to be able to mind the children at the same time, instead of taking on productive employment. This reduces the chance that they have an autonomous income, which, as we will see below, has clear implication for their bargaining power within the household. In this context, economic development can lead to the empowerment of women by freeing their time (which can then be used for market activities or for other things). Greenwood et al. (2005) argues that the diffusion of appliances in the US between 1930 and 1950 was a key driver of the increase in the labor market participation of women during that period and beyond. Dinkelman (2010) exploits the logistical feasibility of the roll out of electrification in South Africa to study the impact of access to electricity on female and male labor supply. She finds that electrification led to an increase in 9.5 percentage point in female employment (without any change in male employment) and argues that this increase was due to time freed for women in home production. Devoto et al. (2011) find no impact on time devoted to market activities when households became connected to piped water in Morocco, but a significant increase in leisure and reduction in stress levels and intra-households conflicts.

Economic Development and Women's Rights

Empirically, there is a strong correlation between economic development and women's legal rights, in areas as diverse as property rights, access to land, access to bank loans, violence against women, abortion policy, etc. Doepke and Tertilt (2009) show a robust negative correlation of 0.4 or higher across countries between the lack of rights and GDP per capita. Historically, the expansion of economic rights to women in the US and Europe preceded their access to political rights (Doepke and Tertilt, 2009, Fernandez, 2009). While it is of course impossible to infer causality from the data, two lines of

argument suggest why economic growth could lead men to willingly surrender economic rights to their wives. Doepke and Tertilt (2009) argue that when the importance of human capital in the economy increases (with technological progress), men start to be willing to surrender some rights to women to ensure that children get better educated (the argument requires that women care more about children's human capital and that bargaining power matter for household decisions, which we will discuss below). The tradeoff is between their utility today, and the utility of their offspring (children, grandchildren, and future generations). Fernandez's (2009) argument is slightly different, although related: she argues that as fertility declines, fathers' interest as husbands (who would like to have all the rights), start to conflict with their interest as fathers (who would like to protect their daughters against their future son-in laws). With economic growth and a decline in fertility, the balance starts tilting towards the latter interest, and women's economic rights are expanded. Doepke and Tertilt provide some historical narrative that is consistent with their theory, and Fernandez some suggestive evidence from the granting of rights to women in the United States that states that had a faster reduction in fertility were more likely to expand women's rights. Empirically, there remains much more to be done, and this is a very interesting area of research. These two papers provide convincing theoretical arguments, however, that economic growth can lead to a progression in women's rights. In fact, Doepke and Tertilt explicitly conclude that institutions such as the World Bank that are interested in women's rights would be well inspired to focus on programs favorable to economic development (such as education policy), rather than push for direct legislative changes for women's rights.

But will Economic Development be enough?

There is evidence that growth will not be enough to overcome discrimination in the home and in a number of domains. Sex ratios remain skewed in favor of boys. In China, despite rapid economic growth (and the reforms described above), the sex ratio at birth has worsened continuously since 1970, with an acceleration in the 1990s from about 53 percent of boys among all (reported) births to about 57 percent of boys among all (reported) births. Within Asia, the sex ratio at birth in South Korea and Taiwan, both rich countries, is similar to that in China and India. The gap between girls and boys is closing for primary and secondary schooling, but for tertiary education, the ratio of females to males has not improved overall, even though participation has risen for both boys and girls. In the labor market, even in developed countries, women who are equally qualified continue to earn less than men at all levels of qualification. Legal rights, particularly property rights, of women remain different from that of men in many countries, even as economies grow. Compared to economic opportunities, education, and legal rights, the gender

gap in political participation has narrowed the least between 1995 and 2005. As of July 2011, only 26 countries in the world had met the target (set by the UN Economic and Social Council in 1990) of having 30 percent or more women in national legislative seats; the proportion of seats held by women in single or lower houses of parliament was only 19.4 percent globally, up from 15.9 in 2005, 13.5 percent in 2000 and 9 percent in 1987 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011). The persistent difference in sex ratios at birth illustrates the fact that economic development, and the availability of new technologies, can have perverse effects on gender equality if it decreases the cost of discriminating against girls. High differences in reported sex ratios at birth between girls and boys are the result of unreported birth–infanticide—and increasingly, from sex-selective abortion. Sex-selective abortion shows how the wider availability of new technologies and the increased well-being of households resulting from economic development have led to an increase in a particularly egregious form of discrimination. This is not limited to China: the 2001 census in India revealed a reversal of the trend in the sex ratios, particularly in the most prosperous states in the north of India. By the time of the 2011 census, they had dropped to their lowest levels since independence. Economic calculus plays a role here as well. Advertisement for clinics practicing sex-selection in Mumbai used to read, “Better pay Rs 500 now than Rs 50,000 later.” (Desai, 1994). The Rs 50,000 refers to the dowry that the parents would need to pay when a girl is married. With the cost of sex identification and abortion becoming so low with new technologies, many more parents may prefer to abort girls rather than to raise and marry them. In Taiwan, Lin, Liu and Qian (2010) document that the sex ratio at birth (i.e. the fraction of boys among live births) in Taiwan increased from 0.515 in 1980 to 0.54 by 1990. All of the increase is accounted for by increases in the sex ratio for higher parity. They argue that the legalization of abortion in Taiwan in 1985/86 (when pre-natal sex determination was already available) is responsible. Even if increased opportunities for women reduce the dowry, there is little chance that they will bring it to such a low enough level so as to make it worthwhile to let a girl live in the face of such a low cost for abortion. Sex selection does not appear to disappear even in the US. When a blood test that can determine the gender of the baby after 7 weeks of pregnancy became commercially available in the US, there were reports of concerns that it could be used for sex-selective abortion (Pam Belluck, New York Times, 2011). These concerns are almost surely justified: even without this test, there is evidence of sex-selective abortion in some ethnic groups in the US and Canada today: in particular, since 1980, there is an abnormal ratio of boys to girls among children at higher parity in Chinese, Korean, Asian American and Indian-American families (Abrevaya, 2009, Almond and Edlund, 2008, Almond, Edlund and Milligan, 2010). Almond and Edlund report, for example, that for third children, if there is no previous boy, boys will outnumber girls by 50%. Using linked records from California, Abrevaya shows that Asian Indian mothers were significantly more likely to

have a terminated pregnancy and to give birth to a boy when they have previously only given birth to girls. Eventually, in societies where there is a male preference, the pressure on the marriage markets due to the rising sex ratio (it is estimated that there are 20million more boys under 20 than girls in China, and 25 million more in India (Edlund and Lee,2009)) may provide some incentive for the sex ratio to revert. Edlund and Lee (2009) provide evidence that the sex ratio is normalizing in Korea, after having exploded with the introduction of sonography. The disparity in earnings at all levels of qualification even in richer countries illustrates the persisting bias against women. This is not the place for a detailed review on gender discrimination in developed countries: Goldin (2006) provides a masterful summary of the long run evaluation of the place of women in society. Gaps in wages, occupation, education, and labor force participation have shrunk considerably in the US from 1930 to 1990, in part due to some of the phenomena we discussed earlier (a rise in the demand for clerical work, the resulting larger investment in education, household appliances, the diffusion of the pill), but the convergence seemed to level off after 1990. Differences in participation and in wages do persist, particularly at the top, in part due to biases towards women, as well as different cultural attitudes of what is expected of women.

Likewise, while a number of factors continue to hinder the parliamentary representation of women—the type of electoral system present in a country, the role and discipline of the political parties, the lack of previous political experience of women—the widespread perception that women are not competent leaders is probably the strongest barrier to greater participation of women in policy making. It persists in developed countries as well: a series of experiments have shown that, holding performance constant, women leaders are evaluated more negatively than male leaders. These studies typically either provide written description of leadership situations, varying the sex of the leader, or use trained actors to lead, allowing the experimenters to control the degree of success the leader achieves (Swim et al., 1989). The surveys find the bias is most pronounced when the leadership role is typically considered a male role.

Similar evidence coming from India suggests that citizens tend to give lower performance marks to female leaders than to male leaders, given the same information about them, are also less likely to associate women with leadership than men, and are generally not feeling positive towards female in politics. Beaman et al. (2009) investigate attitudes in rural West Bengal, using a variety of methods. In one experiment, they ask respondents to listen to a short political speech, read out either by a male actor or a female actor. Among people who had not had the experience of female leaders, randomly selected respondents who heard the “male” speech are significantly more likely to give it favorable marks than those who heard the female speech. In another part of the study, they conduct “implicit association tests”, and show a strong association between women

and the domestic sphere. Finally, respondents (particularly male) seemed quite comfortable acknowledging that they strongly preferred a male as leader rather than a woman (this is in a country that has a female head of the majority party and a female president—since then, the State of West Bengal has also elected a female as the head of the state). It seems that there is a significant cultural barrier to recognizing women as competent policy makers. Evidence such as this provides support for the idea of “reservations” or quotas for women in policy making positions. Since perceptions are biased, in the absence of affirmative action of some sort, it would be very difficult for women to break into politics. Indeed, in most of the 17 countries where the target of 30 percent of women in parliament has been achieved, some kind of affirmative action measure has been in place. If one wants to achieve balanced gender representation rapidly, it seems clear that affirmative action will be needed. More generally, economic development alone will probably not be enough to bring about equality between women and men in the foreseeable future and policies will be required to accelerate this process.

Yet, the gains from policies that target women come, to some extent, at the expense of men. This much is evident in politics. Any position that a woman gets through a quota is a position that a man does not get. The tradeoffs are not always as explicit, but can be very stark indeed. For example, specific measures to improve access of girls to school, such as scholarships for girls or latrines in school, are an expensive way to get more girls into schools. Given that enrollment is already high, many scholarships go to girls who would have gone to school anyway, making the cost per additional girl induced to go to school very high. This means that within the very limited budget of most developing countries, the transfers to girls come at the direct expenses of boys. The money spent on scholarships is not spent on other things that may help both boys and girls, such as hiring new teachers, or deworming everyone. The tradeoffs are real: comparative cost effectiveness research (comparing across different experiments in a variety of contexts) suggest that the cost per extra child enrolled of additional scholarships may be much larger than that of deworming, or informing parents of the returns to education (Dhaliwal et al, 2011). Thus, policies that explicitly favor women need to be justified, not just in terms of being necessary to bring about gender equality, but in terms of gender equality itself being desirable and worth the cost it implies. The second part of this essay explores the common justification that the tradeoff between the interests of various people seen in the short-run is transitory; in the long-run, there is no tradeoff between helping women more and helping everyone, because increasing the share of resources going to women will increase the amount of resources so much that everyone will be better off.

Women’s Empowerment and Economic Development

Benefits of economic empowerment

- When more women work, economies grow. If women's paid employment rates were raised to the same level as men's, the United States' gross domestic product would be an estimated 9 per cent higher, the euro zone's would climb by 13 per cent and Japan's would be boosted by 16 per cent [1]. In 15 major developing economies, per capita income would rise by 14 per cent by 2020 and 20 per cent by 2030.
- Productivity per worker could soar by up to 40 per cent by eliminating all forms of discrimination against female workers and managers.
- Europe can expect a shortfall of 24 million workers by 2040 if women's participation rate remains what it is now; if the rate rises to that of men, the shortfall will be only 3 million .
- An analysis of Fortune 500 companies found that those with the greatest representation of women in management positions delivered a total return to shareholders that was 34 per cent higher than for companies with the lowest representation.
- Evidence from a range of countries shows that increasing the share of household income controlled by women, either through their own earnings or cash transfers, changes spending in ways that benefit children.
- A study using data from 219 countries from 1970 to 2009 found that, for every one additional year of education for women of reproductive age, child mortality decreased by 9.5 per cent. Between 1970 and 1990, the survival of 4.2 million children stemmed from women's increased education.

Women Empowerment and Changes in Family Outcomes

A substantial literature has studied these issues and found clear evidence of a correlation between mothers' education and earnings, and child welfare, particularly child health. Moreover, the correlation with mothers' education and earnings is almost always found to be stronger than the corresponding correlation with fathers' education and earnings. However, correlations are often misleading. In this instance, there are two fundamental problems with the interpretation of the results. First, a woman's education, earnings, or political participation may be correlated with unobserved dimensions of her ability, family, or community background. To the extent that these unobserved factors directly determine child health, the correlation does not indicate the causal effect of raising a woman's education, earnings, or political participation. It is important to recognize that the very fact that women are typically less likely to get an education, earn an income, and participate in political decisions is likely to make this bias stronger for women than for men. Likewise, children might do better in countries or regions where women's political participation is greater because these places are otherwise more favorable environments. Second, the comparison between the coefficients of husbands' and

wives' education or earnings might be obscured by a correlation between wives' education or earnings and unobserved characteristics of husbands for two reasons: On the one hand, more educated or richer women may be able to marry men who care more about their children. On the other hand, the observation that, after controlling for total resources, income in the hands of women is associated with more desirable outcomes than income in the hands of men may reflect unobserved attributes of a man that directly influence child outcomes. For example, if he is progressive enough to allow his wife to seek employment, then this same progressive attitude may make him treat his children better. To get around these problems, researchers have exploited specific circumstances where the distribution of power, education, or earnings of women and men changed for reasons that had nothing to do with their individual choices. These situations allow us to approximate what would happen if women's empowerment policies were put in place and applied to everyone, not only to very special families.

Empowering Women: What Policy Instruments?

The Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) study in India, suggests that it is indeed possible to shift power within the community via a change in the electoral rules. Even if women and men were to have different preferences it is not sufficient to ensure that women policy makers, particularly those selected through quotas, would act any differently than men. In fact, in a perfectly democratic system, they would not, since both men and women would try to do what their constituents expect them to do in order to be re-elected. Additionally, even if we thought women leaders did a better job of understanding women's needs, it would not necessarily follow that policies designed to guarantee greater representation by women would be an effective way to achieve this representation. For example, if women are politically weak, they may find it difficult to influence actual decisions. In India, the reservation policy was (and is still, to a large extent) met with a large measure of suspicion: women would not be powerful leaders; they would be eclipsed by their husbands; or worst, local elite would take advantage of the policy to re-ascertain their power against the Panchayat. And yet the quota policy made a real difference in actual outcomes. Furthermore, this difference appears to be durable, beyond the initial push, by affecting attitudes. The study by Beaman et al. just mentioned takes advantage of India's reservation policy, which specifies that, at each election, one third of the villages are randomly selected and must elect a woman at the head of the local council. They compare the results of the implicit association test associating women and politics and the responses to the speeches. They find that, in men's response to the speeches, all the bias against women is erased (and in fact it becomes a bias in favor of women). The bias against women and leadership is also diminished.

Conclusion

Women's empowerment and economic development are closely interrelated. While development itself will bring about women's empowerment, empowering women will bring about changes in decision-making, which will have a direct impact on development. Contrary to what is claimed by some of the more optimistic policy makers, it is, however, not clear that a one-time impulsion of women's rights will spark a virtuous circle, with women's empowerment and development mutually reinforcing each other and women eventually being equal partners in richer societies. On the one hand, economic development alone is insufficient to ensure significant progress in important dimensions of women's empowerment, in particular, significant progress in decision making ability in the face of pervasive stereotypes against women's ability. On the other hand, women's empowerment leads to improvement in some aspects of children's welfare (health and nutrition, in particular), but at the expense of some others (education). This suggests that neither economic development nor women's empowerment is the magic bullet it is sometimes made out to be. Equity between men and women is only likely to be achieved by continuing policy actions that favor women at the expense of men, possibly for a very long time. While this may result in some collateral benefits, those benefits may or may not be sufficient to compensate the cost of the distortions associated with such redistribution. This measure of realism needs to temper the positions of policy makers on both sides of the development/empowerment debate. This may not be the most comforting message to deliver, but may be necessary to prevent the backlash that failed miracle solutions generally attract.

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